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Despite less than favorable reviews (Greene, 1972; Havassy, 1971; Schutz, 1972), the Inter-American Test of General Abilities\* continues to be one of the most widely used test instruments in bilingual programs around the country (Havassy, 1971; National Consortia, 1971). At least part of its popularity is undoubtedly due to its availability in parallel Spanish and English forms. As a result, its Oral Vocabulary\*\* subtest has been suggested as a measure of dominance between the two languages as well as of proficiency within each language (Greene and Zirkel, 1974).

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ABSTRACT

The Inter-American Test of General Abilities (TOGA) for bilingual children has parallel Spanish and English forms which have been used to determine language proficiency and dominance. Generally, there has been little emphasis on measuring such physical test features as size, spacing, color, and typeface. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the Oral Vocabulary subtest of TOGA, Level I, significantly affects the test performance of Spanish-speaking youngsters. Results indicate that spacing is a significant factor in the test performance of Spanish-speaking youngsters on this test. It is emphasized that lack of research concerning format factors, particularly at the elementary school level, requires prompt action. (BJG)

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The Effect of Visual Format Upon the  
Test Performance of Spanish-Speaking Students

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There has been at least passing attention to the physical features of TOGA in its reviews. Durst (1953) provided general criticism of the art work of the earlier edition. Havassy (1971) provided more specific criticism of the test's format, citing among other things the spatial organization of the response options. The quantitative critique by the Center for the Study of Evaluation at UCLA reported a rating of zero on a scale of 0-2 with respect to visual principals of the O.V. subtest formats (Hoepfner, 1970).

Yet, there has been a total lack of attention given to empirically assessing the effect of the physical features of such instruments upon the test performance of Spanish-speaking youngsters. Nor is this lack limited to the Spanish-speaking area. Rodgers (1966) emphasized that relatively little is known about the possible effect of physical format on the test performance of elementary school pupils in general.

Such possibly significant physical features include illustration size, spacing, color and typeface. Mueller (1972) for example, found that illustration size had a significant effect upon the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test performance of children with serious visual impairments. Marks (1966) explored the relative effectiveness of 22 different formats of test directions for junior high school students.

The spatial arrangements of items, as Rodgers (1966) pointed out, is particularly in need of study. Preston's

(1949, p. 33) comments regarding another test instrument are coincidentally relevant to the O.V. subtest of the level I.

TOGA: "The word mastery subtest in the primary form might better have provided for the spreading of each item along one horizontal line...instead of...arranging the items in two columns." Whether such a revision makes a significant difference has not been empirically investigated.

The purpose of the present study is to determine if a revision in the spatial organization of the response format of the O.V. subtest of TOGA, Level I, significantly affects the test performance of Spanish-speaking youngsters.

#### METHOD

##### Subjects

The subjects of the study consisted of 88 six- and seven-year-old Puerto Rican pupils randomly selected from bilingual classes in three public schools in a large Connecticut city. There were 45 females and 43 males in the sample. They were all of low SES, falling into the bottom two categories of Warner's seven point scale.

##### Instrument

The O.V. subtest of TOGA, Level I, consists of 25 multiple-choice pictorial items designed to assess listening comprehension ability. The test administrator orally presents each

verbal stimulus. The students are then asked to mark the best choice of four pictorial response options. A fifth drawing enclosed in a box is included at the beginning of each of the first 20 items as a marker. The items are arranged 10 to a page in two columns, running down the shorter axis of standard 8½" x 11" paper.

In order to assess the effect of this spatial organization, a revised form of the O.V. was prepared which contained the same items but five to a page in one column running along the 11" axis of the same-sized paper. Thus, the revised form incorporated two changes in format: 1) one column per page rather than two, and 2) more space -- approximately 55 percent more available horizontal space for each item's row of drawings and approximately 30 percent more available vertical space between each item's row of drawings.

The Spanish form (HG-1-DEs) was selected for the purpose of the study, given the trend toward aural Spanish-dominance found to prevail among such students in previous studies (Greene and Zirkel, 1974; Zirkel, 1971, 1973).

#### Procedure

The pupils were randomly assigned to groups of 10-15 each. These groups were alternatively tested with either the original version or the spaced version of the test. The testing was conducted by the same examiner, a bilingual

teacher-intern of Puerto Rican background, and a bilingual aide. All groups were tested during morning hours.

## RESULTS

The mean scores for the two forms of the O.V. are reported in Table I along with the resulting t value.

Table I  
Means, Standard Deviations and t Test Results  
for the Original and Revised Forms of the O.V.

	n	<u>x</u>	s	t
original form	44	14.68	3.97	5.10***
spaced form	44	18.25	2.48	

\*\*\* p .001

It can be readily seen that the mean score on the revised, or "spaced," form of the O.V. significantly surpassed that of the original form of the O.V. beyond the .001 level.

## DISCUSSION

It appears that spacing is a significant factor in the test performance of Spanish-speaking youngsters on the O.V. subtest of TOGA, Level I. The present format of the O.V. seems to present a real and remedial barrier to the optimal performance of such youngsters with respect to demonstrating

their aural comprehension ability in their native language. There certainly is reason to consequently hypothesize and empirically investigate if this intervening factor is even more important in these students' performance on the parallel English version of the O.V.

These findings also suggest other immediate areas for further investigation with respect to the widely used TOGA series. Within the area of spatial organization, it would be of economic as well as educational interest to determine to what extent each of the factors in the present study -- vertical spacing, horizontal spacing, and the column arrangement -- played a role.\* Within the broader area of visual format, the relative importance and optimal mix of other factors casually criticized in the O.V. -- e.g., illustration size and quality (Havassy, 1971) -- also should be empirically examined. One might similarly question whether the use of a fifth drawing as a marker in the first 20 items helps or hinders performance. Such questions may also be constructively asked and empirically answered with respect to the numerical and nonverbal subtests of the Level I TOGA. In constructing and using such series as TOGA, care should be taken not to create a format barrier while attempting to eliminate the language

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\*It should be pointed out that the publisher of the Inter-American series has introduced a Comprehension of Oral Language test series which incorporates a single column arrangement on smaller paper.

barrier.

Nor are such questions intended to be limited to Spanish-speaking students and the TOGA series. Considering the vast amounts expended and the important decisions based continually upon such instruments, the lack of research concerning format factors, especially at the elementary school level, requires prompt action.

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A Study of the Format Factor of a  
Test Instrument for Spanish-Speaking Students

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